

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 05292 01 OF 02 181517Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 SCA-01 H-01 ONY-00
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4474

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5292

STADIS//////////

FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SY

SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWRY

REF: STATE 193782

1. SUMMARY: TOUTAH INFORMED US AUGUST 17 THAT NO MORE THAN 40 MEMBERS OF JEWISH COMMUNITY HAVE BEEN INTERROGATED BY SYRIAN SECURITY RE TRAVEL TO ISRAEL; TWO HAVE BEEN HIT IN COURSE OF INTERROGATION. BAN ON JEWISH CITIZENS TRAVEL IS TEMPORARY ORDER UNTIL HIGHEST SYRIAN AUTHORITIES DECIDE WHAT TO DO ABOUT CASES ALREADY ON HAND. TOUTAH SAYS SYRIAN AUTHORITIES MAY CHOOSE TO IGNORE PAST TRAVEL BUT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DO SO IF US PRESS OR CONGRESS MAKE ISSUE OF IT. HE IMPLORES THAT PUBLICITY BE AVOIDED AT LEAST UNTIL SYRIAN AUTHORITIES MAKE DECISION. AS TO PROCESSING ANY NEW PROPOSALS FOR UNMARRIED WOMEN, FOREIGN MINISTRY TELLS ME SYRIANS ARE WAITING TO SEE IF FIRST BATCH GETS MARRIED IN STATES. I AM CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE INACCURATE REPORTING COMING OUT OF SYRIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON ON THIS QUESTION AND REQUEST I BE KEPT FULLY INFORMED OF PLANS OF PROXY WIVES AS WELL AS PRESS TREATMENT AND STATEMENTS THAT MAY BE MADE.

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05292 01 OF 02 181517Z

END SUMMARY

1. POLOFF MET TOUTAH EVENING AUGUST 17 AND OBTAINED FOLLOWING DETAILS OF NEW TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS ON JEWISH COMMUNITY. NOT MORE THAN 40 SYRIANS FROM JEWISH COMMUNITY HAVE BEEN CALLED IN BY SECURITY FORCES DURING PAST TWO WEEKS FOR INTERROGATION RE SUSPECTED VISITS TO ISRAEL WHILE TRAVELING

ABROAD. OF THESE, APPROXIMATELY 30 INDIVIDUALS HAD ACTUALLY GONE TO ISRAEL, GENERALLY FROM GENEVA, WITH ASSISTANCE OF ISRAELI MISSION THERE. TRIPS TO ISRAEL HAD BEEN MADE OVER COURSE OF PAST YEAR ALTHOUGH MOST OCCURED AFTER SEPTEMBER WHEN TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS WERE EASED. INTERROGATION OCCURRED DAILY OVER PAST TWO WEEKS UNTIL AUGUST 16. THERE WERE NO INTERROGATIONS AUGUST 17. IN TWO CASES, SECURITY INTERROGATORS HIT INDIVIDUALS WHEN THEY REFUSED TO SIGN CONFESSION OF TRAVEL TO ISRAEL.

2. RETURNING TRAVELERS SPOKE FREELY IN JEWISH COMMUNITY OF THEIR VISITS TO ISRAEL UPON THEIR RETURN TO DAMASCUS AND IN A NUMBER OF CASES BROUGHT LETTERS FOR FRIENDS FROM ISRAEL. TOUTAH IMPLIED THAT SYRIAN SECURITY HAD OBTAINED ITS INFORMATION FROM WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. IT APPEARED TO TOUTAH THAT SECURITY OFFICIALS HAD IGNORED FIRST REPORTS BUT WHEN VOLUME BECAME TOO GREAT THEY WERE FORCED TO TAKE STEPS.

3. TOUTAH CLARIFIED THE NATURE OF THE TRAVEL BAN. IT IS A TEMPORARY ORDER ISSUED BY MILITARY SECURITY TO MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO REFUSE TO ISSUE ANY PASSPORTS OR EXIT VISAS TO JEWISH CITIZENS AND TO THE AIRPORT AUTHORITIES TO REFUSE TO HONOR PASSPORTS AND EXIT VISAS ALREADY ISSUED. TRAVELERS ATTEMPTING TO USE PASSPORTS SINCE NEW BAN IMPOSED HAVE BEEN THEM CONFISCATED. ORDER IS VALID UNTIL REVOKED BY MILITARY

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 05292 01 OF 02 181517Z

SECURITY.

4. TEMPORARY TRAVEL BAN HAS BEEN IMPOSED UNTIL AUTHORITIES DECIDE WHAT ACTION AGAINST TRAVELERS TO ISRAEL, IF ANY, SHOULD BE TAKEN. FILE WITH SIGNED CONFESSIONS HAS BEEN SENT TO ALI DOUBA, CHIEF, MILITARY INTELLIGENCE, FOR DECISION. IN ANSWER TO POLOFF'S QUESTION, TOUTAH SAID HE DID NOT THINK SYRIAN AUTHROTIES HAD CONSCIOUSLY RAISED QUESTION OF TRAVEL TO ISRAEL AT THIS TIME IN ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY HALTING FUTURE EMIRGATION OF UNMARRIED WOMEN. BUT HE ADDED:

"I THINK , HOWEVER, THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD WILL HAVE TO BE INVOLVED IN THE FINAL DECISION ABOUT FUTURE JEWISH TRAVEL SINCE HE HAS COMMITMENT TO PRESIDENT CARTER ON THE QUESTION OF EMIRGATION OF UNMARRIED JEWISH WOMEN." TOUTAH NOTED THAT 14TH MEMBER OF FIRST GROUP OF WOMEN, FARHI, WAS REFUSED A PASSPORT BY IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES AUGUST 16 IN ACCORD WITH TRAVEL BAN.

5. ASKED IF HE WOULD GO AHEAD WITH REQUEST FOR EMIGRATION OF NEW GROUP OF WOMEN, TOUTAH SAID HE WOULD NOT AND COULD NOT. TWO DAYS AGO TOUTAH WAS TOLD TO GET OUT OF COLONEL MESSAOUD'S OFFICE WHO REFUSED TO SEE HIM AGAIN AND WAS TOLD BY COMMANDANT ABD AL-SAMAD NOT TO CALL AGAIN UNTIL COMMANDANT

ASKED FOR HIM. TOUTAH
SAID THIS PROHIBITION WILL LAST UNTIL ALI DOUBA ISSUES
DECISION ON VISITS TO ISRAEL. BOTH THE COLONEL AND THE
COMMANDANT, IN TOUTAH'S VIEW, ARE AFRAID THEY WILL BE
BLAMED FOR PERMITTING TRAVEL ABROAD OF THOSE WHO IN COURSE
OF TRAVEL VISITED ISRAEL. IN ANY CASE, TOUTAH SAID,
AUTHORITIES WILL NOT ACT ON NEW GROUP UNTIL THEY SEE WHAT
HAPPENS TO FIRST GROUP: WHETHER THEY IN FACT GET MARRIED
AND WHETHER THEY LEAVE FOR ISRAEL.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 05292 02 OF 02 181607Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 SCA-01 H-01 ONY-00
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4475

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5292

STADIS//////////

FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER FROM AMBASSADOR

6. TOUTAH SAID THERE WAS CHANCE DOUBA AND PRESIDENT
ASSAD WOULD CHOOSE TO IGNORE PREVIOUS VISITS TO ISRAEL AND
WOULD RESCIND TRAVEL BAN. (HE DID NOT SPECULATE ON
WHAT CONTROL SYRIAN AUTHORITIES WOULD TRY TO DEVISE TO PREVENT
FUTURE VISITS TO ISRAEL.) HOWEVER, THEY CANNOT IGNORE THESE
VISITS TO ISRAEL IF THE MATTER BECOMES SUBJECT PUBLIC DEBATE
AND THEY ARE FORCED TO ADMIT TRAVEL HAS GONE ON. TOUTAH ASKED
THAT CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ, SENATORS JAVITS AND STONE, AND STEVE
SHALOM BE ADVISED IMMEDIATELY OF TRUE SITUATION. HE APPEALED
THAT THEY DO AND SEE THAT OTHERS DO NOTHING WHICH WOULD
PUSH SYRIAN AUTHORITIES INTO TAKING ACTION AGAINST INDIVIDUALS
INVOLVED OR AGAINST COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. HE WAS ADAMANT THAT
PUBLIC STATEMENTS, PRESS ARTICLES, LETTERS TO PRESIDENT ASSAD,
ETC. WOULD BE A GRAVE MISTAKE AND DISSERVICE TO JEWISH
COMMUNITY AT THIS TIME. WHEN HE FINDS OUT DOUBA'S DECISION HE
WILL CONSULT WITH EMBASSY OVER BEST TACTICS FOR NEXT STEPS.

7. IN ADDITION, TOUTAH ASKED THAT STEVE SHALOM HOLD UP
ON ANY NEW MARRIAGE PROPOSALS UNTIL DECISION REACHED ON

TRAVEL BAN SINCE LEAKING OF INFORMATION TO JEWISH
COMMUNITY HERE THROUGH LETTERS FROM NEW YORK ON WHO IS
TO BE IN NEXT GROUP WOULD MAKE HIS JOB MORE DIFFICULT IN
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05292 02 OF 02 181607Z

TERMS OF MANAGING EXPECTATIONS IN JEWISH COMMUNITY AND
POSSIBLY IN TERMS OF SECURITY AUTHORITIES' REACTION.

8. IN DISCUSSION WITH AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR SHOEFI
AUGUST 17, I NOTED THAT I ASSUMED WE WOULD SOON BE RECEIVING MORE
MARRIAGE PROPOSALS AND ASKED HIM HOW HE ESTIMATED THE PROSPECTS
FOR THEIR APPROVAL. SHOEFI SAID HE THOUGHT PROSPECTS WERE NOT
BRIGHT FOR EARLY APPROVAL. ACCORDING TO STATEMENT
IN INTERNAL SARG MEMORANDUM WHICH HE HAD READ, THE SYRIAN
AUTHORITIES WISH TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ORIGINAL TWELVE,
WHETHER THEY WOULD IN FACT BE MARRIED IN NEW YORK OR WHETHER
THIS HAD BEEN MERELY A MEANS TO GET THEM OUT OF THE COUNTRY.

9. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE CHARACTERIZED CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ'S
PUBLIC STATEMENT, AS REPORTED BY THE SYRIAN EMBASSY IN
WASHINGTON, AS PARTICULARLY UNFORTUANTE. SOLARZ, ACCORDING
TO THE SYRIAN EMBASSY REPORT, HAD STATED TO THE US PRESS THAT
THE MARRIAGES WERE NOT LEGALLY BINDING BUT THAT THEY HAD BEEN
A WAY OF SECURING THE EMIGRATION OF THE YOUNG WOMEN CONCERNED.
SOLARZ ABOVE ALL, SHOEFI NOTED, SHOULD REALIZE THE ADVERSE
AFFECTS SUCH A STATEMENT WOULD HAVE ON SYRIAN POLICYMAKERS.

I REMARKED THAT THE FIRST PART OF SOLARZ'S STATEMENT WAS A
SIMPLE STATEMENT OF FACT; THE RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE WOULD
NEED TO BE GIVEN CIVIL VALIDITY UNDER AMERICAN LAW.
HOWEVER, I ADDED, I WAS UNAWARE THAT CONGRESSMAN HAD MADE
THE SECOND PART OF THIS STATEMENT AS REPORTED. AGREED THAT
THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH STATEMENT WOULD BE UNHELPFUL WHEN
READ IN DAMASCUS. SAID I WOULD ASK WASHINGTON TO SECURE
CLARIFICATION.

10. COMMENT: I FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SOLARZ MADE
THE SECOND PART OF THE STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO HIM. BUT I
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 05292 02 OF 02 181607Z

IS PLAUSIBLE THAT SYRIAN EMBASSY MISINTERPRETED HIS WORDS.
PLEASE CHECK WITH CONGRESSMAN'S OFFICE AND ADVISE.

11. I FIND IT HOPEFUL THAT IN VIEW OF THE OPENING I GAVE HIM
TO DISCUSS THIS WHOLE QUESTION SHOEFI INDICATED NO KNOWLEDGE OF ANY
NEW RESTRICTIVE MEASURES AFFECTING TRAVEL OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH

COMMUNITY SUCH AS TOUTAH OUTLINED TO POLOFF.
(AS YOU KNOW SHOUI IS PERSONALLY VERY
SYMPATHETIC TO THE PROGRAM OF ASSISTING UNMARRIED WOMEN TO
LEAVE THE COUNTRY.)

12. I SUPPORT FULLY TOUTAH'S CONCLUSION THAT ANY PUBLIC
EFFORT TO CHALLENGE THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES OVER THE TRAVEL
TO ISRAEL ISSUE WOULD BE COUNTER PRODUCTIVE. SYRIAN AUTHORITIES
HAVE APPARENTLY DOCUMENTED CASES OF TRAVEL OF SYRIAN
JEWS TO ISRAEL. IF CHALLENGED, THEY LIKELY TO ARGUE THAT
CONTINUED STATE OF BELLIGERENCY WITH ISRAEL MEANS THEY CANNOT,
FOR REASONS OF NATIONAL SECURITY, ALLOW THEIR CITIZENS
VISIT ISRAEL. IN THEIR VIEW THE RISK OF SYRIAN JEWS
ENGAGING IN ESPIONAGE ON BEHALF OF ISRAEL IS VERY REAL
GIVEN EXTENSIVE FAMILY TIES THAT BIND COMMUNITY HERE
WITH ISRAELIS.

13. EVEN IF AUTHORITIES DO DECIDE TO IGNORE PAST
INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL TO ISRAEL, THEY WILL REMAIN PARTICULARLY
SENSITIVE TO THE DESINATION OF FUTURE TRAVELERS INCLUDING
UNMARRIED WOMEN. FOR THIS REASON I BELIEVE WE SHOULD
RESTRICT NEXT GROUP ONLY TO MARRIAGE CANDIDTES OR THOSE
ALREADY MARRIED, OF WHICH BETSCH CASE IS ONLY CURRENT ONE
TO BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE. IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF AT LEAST ONE
OTHER PROSPECTIVE HUSBAND WERE TO COME HERE AND HAVE MARRIAGE
PERFORMED IN SYRIA. HE COULD RETURN TO US AFTER CEREMONY,
AS DID BETSCH, AND LET TOUTAH HANDLE DOCUMENTATION.

14. FURTHERMORE, I BELIEVE IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE
DO OUR PART HERE TO CORRECT POSSIBLY INACCURATE REPORTING
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PAGE 04 DAMASC 05292 02 OF 02 181607Z

COMING FROM SYRIAN EMBASSY RE DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING
THOSE GOING TO STATES AS RESULT PROXY MARRIAGES. REQUEST
I BE KEPT FULLY INFORMED OF STATEMENTS BY PUBLIC FIGURES
SUCH AS SOLARZ AND OF PLANS REGARDING FUTURE OF PROXY WIVES
ALREARD IN US. BEST NEWS HERE WOULD BE SOME WELL PUBLICIZED
WEDDINGS IN NEW YORK INVOLVING MEMBERS OF ORIGINAL GROUP.

15. OUR OBJECTIVE IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE SHOULD
BE LIMITED ONE OF ENSURING THAT WHATEVER STEPS SYRIAN
AUTHORITIES MAY TAKE TO PREVENT TRAVEL OF SYRIAN JEWISH CITIZENS
TO ISRAEL, THESE STEPS NOT RPT NO IMPINGE ON EMIGRATION EITHER
OF PROXY WIVES OF AMERICAN CITIZENS OR OF THOSE ALREADY MARRIED
TO AMERICAN CITIZENS.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

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